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SUBJECT: BENIN: GOB HOLDS AMBASSADORS CONFERENCE TO BOOST DIPLOMACY

¶1. SUMMARY: On the personal initiative of President Yayi, the GOB held a three-day Ambassadors Conference, February 26-28, the second of its kind since 1981, to revitalize Beninese diplomacy. The event gathered over two-hundred officials and diplomats, including 31 Beninese ambassadors accredited to countries all over the world. Deliberations focused on the assessment of Beninese diplomacy so far and ways to improve and bring it into line with President Yayi's economic agenda. In his opening remarks, Yayi called for a more proactive and result-oriented diplomacy to achieve economic progress. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration, Francophonie and the Beninese Diaspora, Jean Marie Ehouzou, contended that more Beninese diplomats need to be appointed to international organizations and encouraged increased participation of the Beninese diaspora in national economic efforts. END SUMMARY.

¶2. During the February 26 opening ceremony of the Ambassadors Conference, President Yayi said that Beninese diplomacy had been successful since the country embraced democracy in 1990. However, he said that he wanted to reorient Beninese diplomacy towards facilitating international markets for Beninese exports.

¶3. In his opening address, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Marie Ehouzou, took stock of Beninese diplomacy since the 1990 National Conference. He expressed satisfaction at Benin's diplomatic achievements, citing the visits of US president George Bush (February 2008), and Finish President Tarja Halonen (March 2009). Ehouzou mentioned Benin's successful support of Resolution 1612 to fight against the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts during its term on the United Nations Security Council in 2005. He also cited the participation of the Beninese Armed Forces in UN peacekeeping missions as a major diplomatic achievement. The Minister of Foreign Affairs said that Benin had enlarged its circle of partners by resuming diplomatic relations with a number of unspecified countries and by engaging in diplomatic outreach to emerging countries in the Middle East, South Asia and South America. He deplored the fact that Benin had no strategy for getting its officials appointed to regional and international organizations. Ehouzou affirmed that Benin's diplomatic standing was not up to the level that it had been on the international scene in 1990. He recalled that the conference aimed to enable diplomats to meet current economic challenges in order to put in place a more inventive and dynamic development-oriented diplomacy.

¶4. On March 2, Jean-Marie Ehouzou accompanied by the 31 Ambassadors presented the findings of the conference to President Yayi. Recommendations of the conference included strategies to ensure better administrative and financial management of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions abroad to reflect president Yayi's agenda for economic emergence. Diplomats pledged that they would observe the president's instructions to attain this end. Yayi committed himself to making the Ambassadors Conference an annual event to ensure follow-up.

¶5. The February 2009 Ambassadors Conference was the second of its kind since Benin became a democracy in 1981. The GOB held three

seminars in Cotonou (1990, 1998 and 2006), but none had gathered all the Beninese ambassadors. The GOB has expanded its diplomatic presence, from 18 embassies in 1990 to 31 in 2009.

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